

*Artfully Done*

# Whenever Beacon Street is "on a mission" there's story and song for young and old alike

**By Bob Kloos**

Beacon Street is often asked to provide programming for individual age groups — especially youth. But we delight in the opportunity to work with intergenerational groups. When we get to spend several evenings with such a group, it's an even bigger plus.

This year, three invitations to lead missions in Catholic parishes gave us the opportunity to do just that. Each one was unique.

A parish mission is sort of like a multi-day retreat for an entire faith community, usually featuring weekday evening presentations by a guest speaker, often culminating in a liturgy. Such an event can serve many functions. It can be a walk in the desert, a journey to Calvary, a glance in the mirror, a look back, or a road map for the future. Any or all of these, with a mix of story, scripture, and song, will combine to provide the faith-filled traveler with a soulful agenda.

Evening sessions provide occasions to address some of those unanswered questions that deserve more than the mention they sometimes get. Participants can address questions like: How does my faith play a role in the workplace? What words can our family use when matters of faith are discussed? How do I know if and when I am praying? What does it mean to be a member of the Body of Christ?

We routinely find ourselves standing before audiences that include

three or four generations. At these times, we find out just how flexible our material — and our staff — really are. It is wonderful to behold how a single story or song can suit the needs of everyone present, not because the piece was crafted specifically for that purpose, but because family members and parish members are used to adjusting to the needs of those around them on a regular basis.

Indeed, family members are used to sorting out movies or neighborhood events in their own terms. That's what dinner table discussions are for. We knew the people of St. Martha's Parish in Akron, for example, would appreciate the variety of approaches we used as we focused on the particular theme of the evening.

At another parish, the pastor invited me to offer a reflection at each of the weekend liturgies. I think that gave me four opportunities to introduce the mission to the people in the pews and get them to consider returning for the two evening programs. Being the guest preacher is both an honor and an onus; pastors don't surrender that responsibility easily, and the flock will know a shepherd when they hear one. It was an effective way to pique their interest.

The timing of the mission at the parish coincided with the final preparation of dozens of young candidates for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Candidates were obliged to come to the Monday evening session. Of course,

they brought their parents. In rural areas, inviting junior high students to an evening program means you will end up with an equal number of licensed drivers.

We presented a program that related to themes often included in the Confirmation curriculum: responsibility, gift, service, courage, and witness to name a few. Parents listened intently. It had been a while since they had been confirmed, and they wanted to see if what we offered would engage their offspring. More than once, I saw a parent give a nod to a son or daughter as if to say: "That's what I keep telling you."

Leading a mission means being willing to change plans at the last minute and trusting what the Spirit will provide. Just prior to the kickoff, the pastor noticed that the Sunday evening session coincided with Superbowl XXXI. "Lead us not into temptation" were the words that came to mind, so the evening was rescheduled for Monday. That was the day Mother Nature had slated for Blizzard XXV.

The eighty-minute trip from Cleveland took twice as long and I wondered who would be crazy enough, beside myself, to come out on a night like this! In the end, it was a great turnout; well worth the effort.

The bottom line is, no matter what the circumstances, when the faithful are "on a mission," they will do whatever is necessary to hear the Word proclaimed.

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